

# Some Things You Want to Know

## The Rural Mail Service

To the 41,000 rural letter carriers of the United States a legal holiday is not merely a holiday—it is also a day for meeting together in county, district and state associations. Tomorrow will be Independence day and in five states the rural letter carriers' associations will hold conventions, while scores of county and district conventions will be held. The state conventions will meet tomorrow in Colorado at Denver, in Tennessee at Nashville, in Georgia at Rome, in North Carolina at Raleigh and in South Carolina at Newberry. P. V. DeGraw, fourth assistant postmaster general, will attend the North Carolina convention. Memorial day, Thanksgiving day, and such other holidays as the postmaster general may decree as days of rest for the rural letter carrier, are utilized for the purposes of meeting in associations for the advancement of mutual interests.

At the five state conventions tomorrow a question of tremendous importance will be discussed. The very existence of the rural free delivery service, as now conducted, is at stake. A powerful party at Washington, said to have the backing of influential men in the Postoffice department, and certainly having strong support in congress, propose to place the rural free delivery of mail on the contract basis. That is to say, that the government will make a contract for the delivery of mail on each rural route, and the contractor will be responsible to the government. The rural letter carrier then will be no longer an officer of the government, but a man hired by a local contractor. His no longer will serve as the sworn officer of the government and receive a stipulated salary from the Postoffice department, but he will be the agent of the contractor and will be hired at whatever price he may be able to get. In short, it is proposed that the government retire from the direct control of the rural mail service, and place the service on the contract basis, just as the star mail routes now are, and always have been. The advantage sought to be obtained is the great saving in the cost of the service that would result.

Naturally, the rural letter carriers are opposed to the proposed change, for it means that they will go out of business. Their demand for increased pay was refused by a narrow majority in the house of representatives and resignations have been increasing rapidly on account of the unprofitableness of the work. But on the whole, the carriers are anxious to maintain their present position, trusting to the future for better pay. The maximum salary of a rural carrier is \$600 a year, which is paid for a route twenty-four miles long, or longer. For routes less than twenty-four miles in length the pay is decreased on a scale of two-mile gradations, down to the minimum of six to eight miles at \$284 a year.

The rural letter carriers are well organized and have excellent machinery for making their opinions known to the members of congress. They will oppose the proposed contract system on several grounds. They declare that such a wholesale expansion of the star route system, which has been greatly diminished by the rise of the rural free delivery service, would lead to graft of enormous proportions. In support of this they cite the famous star route frauds of thirty years ago and the vast number of small instances of star route grafting or of star route failure to give good service.

They assert that a merchant in the town

from which the rural routes radiate will bid in the contract at a price too low to permit of a living wage in order that he may send out a clerk to deliver mail and wares from his store, to collect letters and orders for groceries on the same trip. The rural carriers now are forbidden to solicit orders even for subscriptions to newspapers. The carrier now devotes his whole time and attention to the postal service, then he would be first a solicitor for a grocery store and second a servant of the postoffice.

The carriers declare that a local parcel post, such as is provided for by several bills pending in congress, would permit everybody to use the rural routes for the delivery of small parcels of merchandise at a reasonable charge to the individual, and that this would result in an enormous additional revenue to the Postoffice department. The objections to this parcel post, which is limited to the carriage of packages originating on the route, were based on the theory that it would interfere with the business of carrying letter and paper mail. If the service is placed on the contract basis, says the carrier, the parcel post will be the chief care of the carrier, while the service would not be available to everybody, nor would the government derive any revenue from it at all.

The National Association of Rural Letter Carriers, at its forthcoming meeting in Little Rock, undoubtedly will protest against the proposed change. The law strictly prohibits the carriers, who are under civil service regulations, from taking active part in politics, but nevertheless there are many politicians who realize the force and power of these carriers, who go about through the country every day and come in direct contact with the farmers. It is more than probable that the rural carriers will find ways and means to extract pledges from congressional candidates, binding them to vote against the contract system. At any rate, leaders among the carriers believe that such a fight is necessary to save the service.

The rural free delivery mail service is perhaps the most popular department of the government. It was established in 1896, by an appropriation of only \$10,000 for experimental purposes. It grew rapidly from that time until October, 1906, when the present postoffice administration, in the interest of economy, adopted a policy of restraint. Since that time no new routes have been established, and the only extensions made have been additions to routes already in existence, or by combining star route and delivery service when practicable.

The postmaster general in his report urging economies in the postal service declared that the rural service showed a net loss of \$28,000,000 for the last fiscal year. Friends of the service declared that this was unjust, in that the rural service was not credited with saving the expenditures of about \$4,000,000 on star routes discontinued, or of more than \$1,000,000 for the fourth class postoffices discontinued. Furthermore, it was urged that the rural routes ought to be credited with a large part of the mail originating elsewhere, but destined for rural delivery, because of the fact that the rural delivery has so greatly stimulated the amount of mail matter going into rural districts.

In a monthly report of the fourth assistant postmaster general, made soon after congress had received the report

showing the alleged \$28,000,000 loss, this language was used: "Through facilities extended by rural delivery, reports received at the department show that farmers save more than \$60,000,000 annually by being relieved of the loss of time required of men and teams which was necessary prior to the installation of the service in making frequent trips to town or village postoffices in their vicinity. The service has helped to advance farm prices at least \$100,000,000, or from 25 to 40 per cent. More than 32 per cent of the inhabitants of continental United States dwell in the rural districts."

Even accepting the statement that the rural service costs \$28,000,000 more each year than it produces in direct revenue, it appears on the authority of the Postoffice department that the service saves far more than half of the people of the country more than \$60,000,000 a year in expense, and that it has added three-fourths of a billion dollars to the wealth of this same 32 per cent of the people. On this showing the rural mail service is entitled to some consideration.

No other agency has done so much for the cause of good roads as has the rural free delivery mail service. The people wanted the service, they were compelled to make their roads passable to get it and they must further improve their roads to keep it. Then, too, the carrier, who must furnish horses and vehicles at his own expense, has a powerful incentive to preach the doctrine of good roads. He does it. The National Association of Rural Carriers is now engaged in an effort to organize a good roads society in every township and county in the country.

The Rural Free Delivery News is the official organ of the letter carriers, and through its columns the carriers and their patrons along the routes are kept in touch with the progress of events in postal affairs, congressional and departmental. This paper gives much space to the good roads propaganda, and serves also as a means of intercommunication among the carriers and as a vehicle of class advertising.

It is impossible to reckon the true worth of the rural mail service by balancing receipts against disbursements. Its indirect worth to the country, material and moral, is incalculable. The people of the rural districts are hoping for the time when the service may be still further extended. In the meantime the carriers are preparing to fight to the end against the proposed abandonment of direct service by the government in favor of the contract system.

**BY FREDERIC J. HASKIN.**  
Tomorrow—The Cost of the Celebration.

**Treasure Trove**

BY H. M. ROBERT.  
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Policeman 27 of Station B, Great Pelican, Fla., his coat unbuttoned, his helmet tilted back from his hot forehead, was fanning himself with a palm-leaf fan in front of Brown's general store.

It was a sweltering day and nothing was so far from the policeman's mind as the thought of criminals. Station B was, in fact, the headquarters of a large tract of pine and palmetto barrens upon the outskirts of a phosphate camp inhabited by a few score negro laborers, and beyond an occasional arrest for drunkenness on pay nights, the policeman's duty was a simple one.

Policeman 27 took a grip of ice water and looked lazily along the struggling street of shacks. The only thing that stirred was an old shuffling figure that moved unsteadily across some building lots toward a cluster of oaks nearby.

"Who's that old fellow, Mr. Brown?" asked Policeman 27, galvanized into sudden activity. "Stranger here?"

"I reckon so," answered the storekeeper lazily. "Looking over those lots that I gave Smith the option on, I guess."

"I seen him yesterday," said the policeman, buttoning up his coat. "And now I come to think of it, I seen him the day before, under them oaks. But I never noticed his walk before."

"Oh, he's only some country cracker," answered the storekeeper. "What's the matter with his walk?"

"Prison walk," answered Policeman 27. "Can't be mistook. They say it takes three years to get it, and when you've got it you've got it for keeps. You'll hang around here tonight."

"This place is yours," said the storekeeper. "But I reckon any crook'd be a fool to look for anything round here."

Jim Cable's actions, to one who constantly observed him, would certainly have appeared peculiar. Three times, on three successive days, he had gone stealthily to the spot under the oaks where he had secreted his pick and shovel in a palmetto cluster, and, standing there, had looked round him helplessly, muttering and measuring. Now he was resolved to wait till daylight and prosecute his quest.

Five days previously he had been discharged from the state penitentiary after an imprisonment that had lasted five and forty years. In the beginning of the year 1865 Cable had been sent to prison for killing a man. When the day of his freedom dawned he would not go penniless into the world.

Because pencil and paper were denied him, he had carried the measurements in his head through all those five and forty years, repeating them until they became, as it were, a ritual that he could never forget.

Only one thing puzzled him now. The clerk saying which was the central point of his mental diagram had disappeared. He walked among the oaks muttering, as the sun gradually moved down the burning expanse of the sky. The shadows grew longer. All at once Cable understood.

"By gum! What a fool I've been!" he cried aloud. "Even an oak puts on a mighty deal of growth in forty-five years. Why, that sapling must be a big tree by now. And them's it," he added, indicating a twin oak tree that sprang from a single root.

He could hardly wait till dark, but as soon as the sun went down and the full moon appeared in the west began plying his pick and shovel with nervous haste. After

a half hour's digging Cable's pick rang upon metal. A few more strokes and he had uncovered the upper portion of a steel safe, red with rust but still solid and strong. He worked around it until it was completely excavated. Then, bending down the old man braced himself against the trunk and strove to lift the safe. He could not budge it.

He desisted at last and broke into querulous, childish sobs. "Ef I had had the key!" he muttered. "I never found no key!"

That was the moment when the hand of Policeman No. 27 descended upon the old man's shoulder. He sprang round with a snarl to find himself a prisoner of the law. "Let's see what you've got in that box," said the policeman inquisitively. He bent down and with a prodigious exercise of strength lifted it from the hole, only to let it fall back again.

"By Jiminy, it's been there a long time! What's inside—money?"

Suddenly Cable tumbled upon his knees and caught the policeman's hand. "There's nigh on to a hundred thousand dollars in bills inside," he pleaded. "It's half yours of yours! Let me open it, it's mine. I put it there for safety when I was a young man. I'll divvy up with you."

The policeman reflected. The largeness of the sum made him suspicious. The old man was probably a lunatic. On the other hand, his story were true as to the amount it must be the proceeds of a robbery. He could hardly hope to secrete his share and avoid detection. If he reported his discovery it would undoubtedly mean promotion and release from the tedium and opprobrium of Station B.

So on the next day the following story appeared in the Great Pelican News: "After forty-five years the proceeds of an ancient robbery have just come to light. Possibly some of the older generation may recollect the sensational burglary of the Pelican Farmers bank in February, 1865. According to newspapers of that time the vault of the bank was entered and bills to the amount of \$100,000 were extracted in a small safe, which the robber carried away in a cart that was in waiting. As the man leaped into the vehicle he was surprised by the night watchman. He coolly shot him dead, gathered up the reins and drove off into the pine wastes, where he was located and arrested on the following day. He had found time, however, to secrete his booty, which, in spite of the most energetic search, was never recovered.

"Yesterday an aged man, giving the same name—Jim Cable—as that under which the robber had been convicted, was discovered by policeman No. 27 of station B, in the act of excavating a safe from under a large oak in the vicinity of Brown's general store. When apprehended he stated that he was the robber, that he had been released recently from state's prison after serving a commuted sentence of forty-five years and that the safe contained the proceeds of his plunder.

"An offer to share this wealth with the policeman was indignantly refused, and Cable was conveyed to headquarters, where he is now in custody under a technical charge of vagrancy. A dispatch from the penitentiary confirms the statement that Cable was released last week, and it is believed that his story is true.

"Policeman No. 27 has been transferred to station A as a reward for his enterprise.

"So far, the safe has defied all attempts to open it, but this will be effected this afternoon with nitroglycerin."

George Lorimer, manager of the Pelican Farmers' bank, read this item at breakfast.

He dashed down his paper and ran all the way to police headquarters, where he excitedly demanded that the safe be instantly turned over to him, as the representative of the bank. His request being politely refused, he dashed out of the station, and twenty minutes later, an injunction was served upon the chief of police forbidding the safe to be opened and ordering that it be sealed until its ownership should be decided upon by the courts.

On the same morning, half an hour after the injunction had been issued, William Brown, proprietor of a general store, appeared at police headquarters with the request that the safe, having been discovered upon his land, be handed over to him as sole proprietor. He was confronted with the injunction and withdrew, muttering threats, to file a claim with the courts.

Hardly had William Brown left the police station when a certain Maximus Smith made his appearance. He stated that the land on which the safe had been found had been leased to him under a year's option for the purpose of cutting it up into building lots. He had just completed his purchase and demanded the safe. Subsequently he, too, filed a claim with the courts.

An interesting legal battle was now imminent. In the heat of the debate, which became quite wide, Jim Cable's offer, whatever it might be, was forgotten. Symptathy was aroused for him, and a subscription was started which provided funds to afford the old man ease for a time. Ultimately, after his deposition had been taken, he was discharged from custody and went home.

The court duly convened at last, when a surprise was afforded by the appearance of the district attorney of Great Pelican. He interposed the plea that, inasmuch as the city had passed a resolution at the last meeting of the council in favor of the acquisition of the Brown's farm, for the establishment of a municipal water works, the safe, having been found on the property, should be committed to the care of the city.

A representative of the state here intervened with a claim upon the ground that the safe and its contents came under the classification of reserved phosphate coal and rare and precious mineral lands.

When these claims had been formally entered a little man sprang up from among the body of the spectators and demanded the immediate custody of the safe and its contents. He held in his hand a formidable document, from which he read lengthy extracts. During the latter years of the eighteenth century, he stated, when England captured Florida from Spain, the land upon which Great Pelican stood had been granted, with all manorial rights, to a certain William de Buckley, Esq., Genl. of Buckley-super-Thames, England. Now, inasmuch as the land had never been formally escheated, the safe and its contents reverted, a moiety to the descendants of the said William de Buckley and a moiety to the English crown. He, therefore, respectfully demanded that he be granted full possession of the safe.

The court adjourned and animated discussion arose among the claimants and their partisans. It was generally agreed, however, that the Pelican Farmers bank stood the best chance, with the Brown-Smith claims a close second. After much bartering the descendants of William de Buckley formally surrendered all his own rights in consideration of the sum of \$5, contributed jointly and severally by the other five claimants, thereby assisting the ends of justice.

After a short deliberation the court announced its decision. Inasmuch as the contents of the safe had not been examined, it announced, argument as to ownership at present appeared superfluous. The court therefore directed that the safe be opened by an officer of the police de-

partment in the presence of the five claimants, or their representatives, at 4 o'clock the following afternoon. This was done. A charge of dynamite having effected its work, the claimants, headed by the chief of police and a couple of reporters, broke through a jeering mob, which openly proclaimed that the safe was stuffed with old tags, and dashed into a handful of bills and held them under the electric globe and the five claimants, pressing around him, looked at them.

Then the manager of the Pelican Farmers' bank smiled coldly, clasped on his hat and strode out of the vault.

The state and city representatives invited each other to come and have a drink. Maximus Smith asked William Brown how much he would give to get back his building lots again and leave him only the option.

Policeman 27 hastened away to his new post in Station A before he could be transferred.

"What's the matter?" asked a cub reporter of one of the elder men. "Don't they want it any more?"

"None," the other replied. "Confederate bills."

**A Bachelor's Reflections.**  
Industry without judgment can beat a runaway automobile for smashups. A romance is so fascinating to a girl about a romance is so little sense ever goes with it. A woman can make money out of how it rains when the grocer's boy said it was going to be fair. Some people are so naturally cranky they want you to have a bad temper so they can abuse you for it. A man with money in his pocket goes into a restaurant and orders terrapin because he likes ham and eggs better. The reason so many men make love to a girl is because she says she does. A woman can know ten times as much as her husband and be satisfied to let him act as if it were the other way round. When a man who has a dollar looks to a man when he spends it upon his wife at home than when he throws it away upon friends downtown.—New York Press.

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